

Sunday Sermon: August 2, 2018

Sermon Text: James 1: 17-27

Sermon Theme: This is no time to rest

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Labor Day is tomorrow. All around the country people are working to get in one more vacation, one more camping trip, one more get-away. People are looking forward this extra day off. A day to relax and have some fun before the winter gets here.

Are you looking forward to a break? What are you going to do with that extra day? Are you going to catch up on some house or yard work? Are you going to catch up on some good movies or binge watch a TV show? Are you going to sleep in and then take a long nap?

Rest is important for most people. We need time to recharge so that we can think clearly and act wisely. Companies are seeing the need for rest during the work day. Companies like Google even set aside time for rest. They have special resting pods where you can take a short rest break during your day. We need rest and we like it.

But what if I told you that tomorrow was not a day for rest? What if there were no Labor Day tomorrow? What if there were no days set aside for rest?

Each one of our readings this morning has highlighted Christian obedience to God's Word. There is no time in our walk of faith when we can take a break and rest from our faith and thanks to God. In our sermon text for this morning, the apostle James reminds us to keep on doing what the Word of God says because there is no time to rest.

The book of James could be considered a handbook for Christian living. If you are a new Christian, this would not be the first book that you would read. It would be a book to read sometime after confirmation when you wondered, "Now what?"

James is very straight forward in the tone of his book. He wants those who are standing in faith to guard their faith against the attacks of the devil. To do this he advocates knowing the Law of God and living according to it. He teaches Christians how they should live and act as Christians.

James uses the Law as a guideline for our Christian living. Two of the uses of the Law are for anyone. When the Law is used as a mirror, it shows anyone their sins. When the Law is used as a curb, it stops the sinful actions of any person. However, this third use of the Law, a guideline for living, is only for Christians like you and me because it is motivated by our love for God and love for our Savior.

If you would go to an unbeliever and tell them, this is the way you should live because God says so, you would probably get a bunch of different responses, not many of them good. This is simply because right and wrong is different for a believer and an unbeliever. A believer's sense of right and wrong is based in the truth of the Bible, while the unbeliever's is not. This is why the values and morals of society differ so greatly from that of a Christian.

A believer knows that right and wrong is built on the solid foundation of God's Word and living according that Word is motivated by our love for Christ what he has done for us. James uses the Law as a guideline to show us how to live in a way that thanks God.

Many think that James is without Gospel motivation. But as we look at the book we see the Gospel come shining through right here in our sermon text this morning.

¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

James summarizes the great love of our God with some pretty simple words. All the gifts that we get in our life come from the God our Father. It is God the Father who sees to it that we have food on the table, clothes on our backs and a place to live. It is God the Father who protects us and preserves us in this world. These good gifts are reason for thanks.

But more than those earthly gifts, we have reason to thank God for the spiritual gifts that he gives to us. Although it is part of a divine mystery that we cannot fully understand, God has chosen us to be his own. This is pure Gospel. We did not choose God, our sin would never allow us to do that. In his great love, our God chose us and something for us. He chose to not allow us to die in our sins. He chose to make us his very own children.

God chose to free us from the sin that separated us from him. He chose to do this in a special way. He didn't choose that we should work off our sins with good works or service to him. He chose that he would send his own Son to free us from that sin by his suffering and death. He chose to give us the blessings that Jesus won on the cross though we don't earn or deserve them. He chose to send the Holy Spirit to work faith in our hearts through the Word. For many of us, the Holy Spirit began his work at our baptism and continues to work the miracle of faith through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament today.

God chose us to be his very own children because he loves us. But if we think that God and his love will be here today, but he change his mind tomorrow, James reminds that God's love for us does not change like a shadow which is here and then gone. This love that God has for us, which has saved us and watches over us, is the same from the first day we took breath on this earth to the last day we walk on it.

This is the love that motivates us to live in a way that is God-pleasing. James shows the love of God to his listeners, then he shows them how to guard their hearts and their lives by living our thanks every day in a God-pleasing way.

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It almost sounds as if the Christians that James is speaking to had taken a break. It sounds like maybe they took a day off from Christian living, then that day turned into two, which turned into a week which turned into more. The devil is very good at leading us away from God's Word and into little ways that don't seem so bad.

James highlights one of those ways: we know what the Word says, but we choose to ignore it and do our own thing. Read James' words again and think about your own life. Are there things in your life that you completely understand are sins, but you haven't stopped doing them and you really don't feel bad about them anymore. Are you listening to the word, but taking a break from doing what it says?

What personal sins do you see when you are looking into the mirror of the Law? Do you see the sins of alcohol or drugs that cloud our minds on purpose, do we see sexual sins and lust but figure it's part of life, do we see greed or coveting what is not ours let that discontent with God be in our lives, do we struggle with anger and quarrel with everyone to get our way, do we see gossip where we tear down others without thinking or caring about who we are hurting? When you look into the mirror of the Law what personal sins do you see? More importantly, what sins are you turning a blind eye to?

James even uses that analogy of being blind towards our sin. Not many people look at themselves in the mirror and then forget what they look like, or walk away from the mirror and think they look like a million bucks when they are fresh out of bed. But that is what we do with our sins. We carry them around with us and don't think about them and realize how terrible they are.

²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

James tells us to not be lazy, to not rest from our life of faith and thanks to God. Instead he tells us to be active and to hear the Law of the Lord, love the Law of the Lord and follow the Law of the Lord because it is the Lord that gives freedom from so many things, not the devil and sin.

It is God who gives true freedom through Jesus. Jesus never rested in his obedience to all that God commanded in the Law Jesus was perfect for us. Because of Jesus, God turns a blind eye to our sins. He doesn't do that because he didn't catch us or because we are so sneaky at hiding our sins, God turns away from our sins because Jesus has already paid the price and taken the punishment for them on himself. We are forgiven for Jesus' sake, not for own.

Because of this great love that God has shown to us what should we do? Should we continue sinning? Should we continue to turn a blind eye to our sin? Should we rest from being watchful?

Labor Day is a great day for rest. But James tells us that a believer should never rest. Every day is a day that we must be vigilant, armed with God's Word as our defense. Every day we must be ready, as God's children, to live our life of faith and thanks to Jesus because there is never a time for rest. Amen